

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR FORT.

ST. JOHNS BLUFF, FLORIDA

Durak Co.

HABS No. 15-2.

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT No. 15

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY.
BERNARD W. CLOSE—DISTRICT OFFICER
1005 BISBEE BUILDING, JACKSONVILLE, FLA.

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SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR FORT
St. John's Bluff
Duval County, Florida

Owner:

Date of Erection: 1898.

Architect and Builder: U.S. Government.

Present Condition: Ruins.

Number of Stories:

Materials of Construction: Concrete.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

FOREWORD.

The enclosed data is supplied by Mr. T. Frederick Davis, Historian, from his History of Jacksonville, Florida, from maps and other documents in his possession, and from actual observations of the SPANISH-AMERICAN FORT on St. Johns Bluff, the structure of which exists in excellent preservation.

Donald Corley,
Squad Leader.
1934.

NOTES CONCERNING ST. JOHNS BLUFF AND THE SPANISH-
AMERICAN FORT.

The significance of the Bluff, which at present is
seventy-five feet in height, and the only elevation of
strategic value in the vicinity, as it relates to the
earliest American History, is incalculable.

Mr. T. Frederick Davis, Florida State Historian,
makes this statement: "The destiny of this continent
was settled at St. John's Bluff in the battle between
the Spaniard Menendez and the French at Fort Caroline,
on September 20, 1565."

Fort Caroline was named for Charles IX., Boy King of
France, who, having been notified by the Admiral de
Chatillon that re-inforcements were needed by the small
body of French whom Jean Ribault had left to maintain
the French dominion in Florida, ordered the Admiral to
fit out an adequate fleet.

A nobleman, Rene de Laudonniere, was appointed Lieutenant
to the King, and sailed from Havre de Grace on April 20,
1564, reaching the mouth of the St. John's River, (then
called the "River of May"), on June 22, 1564.

Laudonniere selected the shore of the hammock of land
north of the Bluff as the site of Fort Caroline, and there
built the triangular fortified village described in detail

by the artist LeMoyne, surnamed De Morgues, in his
"Narrative" of the Expedition.

Fort Caroline was about two hundred yards from the base
of the Bluff, and half a mile from the summit of it, and
the land, (eroded during the 1880's by new river currents),
of the hammock was called "The Vale of Laudonniere." And it
is so designated on old maps.

LeMoyne, Cartographer and Delineator to the King, made
several drawings of Fort Caroline, but without dimensions.
It had a moat and a causeway, and within its enclosure
stood many houses for the soldiers of fortune, artificers,
sailors, and others who had made up the three shiploads of
Laudonniere's fleet. Conjecturally it was from a hundred
to two hundred feet in width at the center.

Laudonniere's own description of this wide river country,
inhabited at that time by King Saturioua's people, was:
"A man may behold the meadows divided asunder into isles
and islets, interlacing one another, a place so pleasant
that those who are melancholic would be enforced to change
their manner."

Fort Caroline was taken from the French on September 20,
1565, by the Spaniard Menendez, who came up from St. Augus-
tine, and who camped by a pond on St. Johns Bluff the night
before, and held a council that decided the nationality of
Florida.

The English, about 1778-1780, built a Fort on the point of St. Johns Bluff, (see accompanying Map), all remnant of which disappeared in the river erosion during the 1880's. Its shape and approximate size is taken from a Survey made by Le Baron, about 1880.

Confederate Fort. During the summer of 1862 there was a partial blockade of the Florida north-east coast by a squadron of Admiral's DuPont's fleet.

To keep the gunboats from coming up the St. Johns River, Gen. Joseph Finegan devised Batteries for St. Johns Bluff, with two twelve-pounder rifle guns and two eight inch howitzers. These were placed in position the night of September 9, 1862, without the knowledge of two Federal gunboats anchored in the river a short distance below. Several engagements resulted, between this battery, further reinforced by two eight inch columbiads and one other gun, and five other Federal gunboats in the river, during the weeks following.

On October 1, 1862, a Federal force was sent from Hilton Head, S. C., of 1470 infantry, a battery of light artillery, and a cavalry troop, to support a combined land and naval attack on this battery.

The Battery was abandoned on October 2nd. The Federal forces took possession on the 3rd, and the magazines and works destroyed.

THE SPANISH-AMERICAN FORT ON ST. JOHN'S BLUFF.

The river was surveyed by General Wilson, U. S. Army, in March, 1898.

It was decided to erect emplacements for two eight inch breech-loading rifles at St. John's Bluff, as coast defence against Admiral Cervera's Fleet.

Construction was begun in April, 1898. "On April 15 the American flag was hoisted there, to speak defiance to the Spanish, who from this same elevation made the charge upon the French Fort Caroline, 333 years before. St. John's Bluff had now witnessed the flags of five nations, flying over nearby fortifications." - History of Jacksonville by T. Frederick Davis.

The "Tram" was laid up the slope, and through the jungle, as shown on Map, and was powered by an engine at the summit. The works were completed about the time Cervera's fleet was destroyed.

The Battery at St. John's Bluff was abandoned in ~~October~~, 1899, and the two rifles dismantled and sent to Pensacola.

The Fort is built entirely of granite concrete $1\frac{1}{2}$ " aggregate, on a 3' foundation of shell concrete, or "tabby." The roofs of the Bombproof Magazine are reinforced with 3" I beams and channels. The original metal doors have disappeared. The structure is in perfect preservation. The "Tram" tracks have been removed.

"APPROVED: *Bernard W. Close*
Bernard W. Close,
District Officer."

Revised 1936, H.C.F.

Addendum to
Spanish-American War Fort
St. John's Bluff
Duval County
Florida

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20001

ADDENDUM TO
SPANISH-AMERICAN
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See also HABS FL-15 for additional drawings.